Ernest Renan (1873)
“THE period covered by the present volume is, after the three or four years of the public life of Jesus, the most extraordinary in the entire development of Christianity. Here, by a singular touch of the great unconscious Artist who appears to rule in the seeming caprice of historic evolution, we shall see Jesus and Nero – Christ and Antichrist – set, as it were, in contrast, face to face, like heaven and hell. The Christian consciousness is now full-grown. Hitherto it has known little else than the law of love: Jewish intolerance, though harsh, could not fret away the bond of grateful attachment cherished in the heart of the infant Church for her mother the Synagogue, from whom she is still hardly sundered. Now at length the Christian has before him an object of hate and terror. Over against the memory of Jesus rises a monstrous form, the ideal of evil, as He had been the ideal of holiness. Held in reserve, -like Enoch or Elias, to play his part in the last great tragedy of the world, Nero completes the cycle of Christian mythology: he inspires the first sacred book of the new canon; by a frightful massacre he lays the corner-stone of Romish primacy, and opens the way to that revolution which is to make of Rome a second Jerusalem, a holy city. At the same time, by a mysterious coincidence not infrequent in great crises of human destiny, Jerusalem is overthrown; the Temple disappears; Christianity, disburdened of a restraint already painful and advancing to a broadening freedom, follows out its own destinies apart from conquered Judaism. ” (*Antichrist*, Intro.)

Reviewer of Renan’s “St. Paul” in the pages of “The Edinburgh Review,” April, 1870

“This volume [“The Life of St. Paul”] takes us through the whole period of, what we may call, the ministry of the great apostle, embracing those all-important fifteen or sixteen years (A.D. 45-61), during which his three missionary journeys were undertaken, and the infant Church, with four bold strides, advanced from Jerusalem to Antioch, from Antioch to Ephesus, from Ephesus to Corinth, and from Corinth to Rome. Once arrived there, once securely planted in that central and commanding position, strange to say, the Church, with all its dramatis

personae, suddenly vanishes from our view. The densest clouds of obscurity immediately gather round its history, which our eager curiosity in vain attempts to penetrate. It is gone, amid a wreath of smoke, as completely as when a train plunges into a tunnel. In the words of M. Renan – 'The arrival of St. Paul at Rome, owing to the decision taken by the author of the "Acts" to close his narrative at that point, marks for the history of the origin of Christianity the commencement of a profound night, illuminated only by the lurid fire of Nero's horrible festivities, and by the lightning flash of the Apocalypse.' The causes of this sudden and confounding disappearance have not, to this day, been thoroughly investigated. . . . The history of St. Paul's life, and the history of the Apostolic age, together abruptly end. Black darkness falls upon the scene, and a grim and brooding silence – like the silence of impending storm – holds in hushed expectation of the 'day of the Lord' the awe-struck, breathless Church. No more books are written, no more messengers are sent, the very voice of tradition is still. One voice alone, from amid the silence and the dread, breaks upon the straining ear; it is the Apocalyptic vengeance-cry from Patmos, 'Babylon the Great is fallen, is fallen! Rejoice over her, thou heaven! and ye holy apostles and prophets! for God hath avenged you on her: she shall be utterly burned with fire, for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.' " (Rev.18:20) (*quoted in The Parousia*, **afterword**.)